

# A Wild Coincidence:

A stranded Trooper at Eagle Summit saves the life of an injured snowmachiner

Story by: Megan A. Peters

Changing weather patterns are nothing new to Alaska Wildlife Trooper Timothy Abbott. It'll be beautiful out but after a few hours angry weather patterns can move in. That is exactly the situation Trooper Abbott found himself in on the afternoon of Jan. 1, 2016 on Eagle Summit. Fortunately, it happens so frequently, he routinely carries extra winter survival gear, bunny boots, trauma kit and more when out on patrol.

"In the early afternoon when I drove through the pass and it was just beautiful out," Abbott said. "At about 4:30 when I was heading back to Fairbanks the wind and snow were blowing so bad that I couldn't see more than 15 feet out the window."

What brought Trooper Abbott out into the field that day was the Fortymile caribou hunt nearing completion. The hunt was expected to close quickly due to many of the caribou hanging close to the road which made them easy targets for hunters.

Trooper Abbott soon found himself stranded on a stretch of the Steese Highway in the pass near Eagle Summit. Up to ten other motorists were also stuck in the pass and they had to wait out the night for a plow to come to their rescue since digging out wasn't an option during the blizzard. The wind was easily blowing snow at 85 miles per hour.

"Some snow drifts were well above my head. The wind was blowing so badly that snow backfilled as soon as I pushed it away," Abbott said. "I ended up sleeping in my truck. At about three in the morning I woke up and it was clear again; I could see the northern lights."

What happened a couple hours later makes Trooper Abbott believe a higher power must have had a hand in keeping him stuck in the pass.

"It was about five in the morning and I heard a snow machine drive up. A man started yelling he needed help and he needed my truck," Abbott said. Trooper Abbott was in an unmarked truck usually driven by Public Safety Technicians as his regular patrol vehicle was in the shop. "I don't think he expected to find a trooper stepping out since it was just a regular green F-250."

The man was 21-year-old North Pole resident Shawn Kirkvold. Kirkvold told Trooper Abbott that he needed the truck because his friend was hurt and needed help. On the snowmachine, Trooper Abbott saw that another man sat bleeding with an obviously bad injury. Trooper Abbott did a quick assessment of the man and called the Alaska State Trooper dispatch in Fairbanks to get medical help on the way as soon as possible. Then he tripped the switch on his personal locator beacon so whoever was coming could have the precise coordinates.

"Neither one of the men were prepared for an extended stay outside and certainly not for snowmachining. One of them was only wearing tennis shoes and both men had signs of hypothermia," said Abbott. He guessed that the temperature was in the single digits or the teens at that point. "I got Kirkvold in my truck to warm him up but the other guy— I didn't want to move him. It looked like a knife was sticking out of his leg but it was his bone."

Trooper Abbott had recently attended a tactical casualty training course in Fairbanks



*Alaska Wildlife Trooper Tim Abbott with an injured eagle in 2014 in Aniak, Alaska.*

where he got a refresher basic first aid and learned on how to use a tourniquet and how to treat traumatic wounds. The training was meant for a mass causality incident, but the skills he honed were perfect for dealing with the situation at hand.

“I never have seen an injury so bad before in real life,” Abbot said. “You see this stuff on TV, but I hadn’t seen anything close to it up close.”

Trooper Abbott built a makeshift tent around the injured man. Between Abbott’s parka, survival sleeping bag and a survival blanket, it didn’t take long for the man to warm up. The only thing left out in the elements was the man’s leg.

“I had to yell at him at one point to not move around. I was afraid that warming his leg up or moving it might cause everything to go from bad to worse,” said Abbott.

During the wait for help, Trooper Abbott learned that the injured snowmachiner had been on a separate machine when the men crashed. The pair was speeding along on the sleds when Kirkvold stopped and the other man crashed into the back of Kirkvold’s snowmachine. Kirkvold loaded his friend up on his machine and set out for help.

Before 8 o’clock in the morning, a Black Hawk crewed by Charlie Company 1st of 52nd Aviation Regiment, based out of Fort Wainwright, came and whisked away the injured snowmachiner. The man was transported to Fairbanks Memorial Hospital to undergo emergency surgery.

Kirkvold had to stay behind with Trooper Abbott. When Trooper Abbott contacted dispatch, he learned Kirkvold had a couple outstanding warrants against him.

A couple more hours passed before snowplowers and two other Alaska Wildlife Troopers were able to get to the scene to help free Trooper Abbott and the other stranded motorists from the Pass.

If it wasn’t for Trooper Abbott being stranded by the blizzard, it is very unlikely the injured snowmachiner would have survived his ordeal.

